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ABSTRACT

The present study, based on data gathered after the first year of a longitudinal investigation, was designed to compare the second generational effects of long-term father absence on children whose fathers are classified as "missing in action" and children whose fathers were held prisoners during the Vietnam War but returned to their families. The study included 99 children of returned prisoners of war and 105 children of men who remain "missing in action." The investigators were concerned with examining whether the children whose fathers have not returned would have greater difficulty adjusting than the children whose fathers returned. All subjects were administered the California Test of Personality approximately 12 to 24 months after the return of American prisoners of war from Vietnam to determine their levels of personal and social adjustment. Scores are compared using a t-test for significant differences. Findings indicated that the groups differed in two areas of adjustment: one area of personal adjustment, manifestation of nervous symptoms, and one area of social adjustment, community relations; in both cases the children whose fathers did not return were indicating poorer adjustment. (Author)

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Second Generational Effects of War-Induced Separations: Comparing the Adjustment of Children in Reunited and Non-Reunited Families

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The literature is replete with investigations documenting the detrimental effects of father absence upon the adjustment of children. Within the military setting emphasis has been placed upon short-term absence due to military obligations, [1, 2, 3, 4, 5] and upon the disturbing effects of prolonged separations fostered by war[6, 7, 8, 9, 10]. Although some studies have attempted to examine the differential effects of father's return upon the family system and its individual members[2, 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15], few of these studies

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specifically related to the effects of father's separation and father's return upon the children are conclusive. Since investigators have stressed that the longer the period of father absence, the more severe are the effects on the children[2, 5, 15], one might easily conclude that father's return would unequivocally have immediate and beneficial effects upon the children's emotional and social development. Yet, other investigators have indicated that father's actual return is not a panacea. Baker, et al.,[11] in their study of father absence in the military, pointed out that fathers return willing to accept some responsibilities for the family's vicissitudes and to offer reparation, but they also bring their own situational trauma. Murphy and Zoobuck[14], in rank ordering those factors in military life which appear most stressful in the cases they studied, found that although the most important was father's absence from the home, the second most stressful was his return which often appeared to upset the balance established during his absence. Certainly, the effects of father's return upon the children warrants further investigation.

The present investigation of the effects of father's return was prompted by the results of an earlier study which examined the personal and social adjustment of a sample of 99 children of returned American prisoners of the Vietnam conflict[12]. The findings of this study indicated that the returnees' children's scores on the California Test of Personality (CTP), when compared with normative data, were uniformly below the norm in the realms of both personal and social adjustment. The basic findings are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

However, in the initial study, in the absence of baseline measures (CTP scores before father's absence) and a comparison group, it was not possible to

determine the differential effects of father's absence and father's return. Conceivably, the stresses of father absence would account for the negative findings of children being below the norm in both personal and social adjustment, but father's return may have fostered improvements in the children's social and personal adjustment (assuming they were below the norm initially). In recognition of the need to test these possibilities within the framework of a longitudinal study, the investigators proposed obtaining additional data on a comparison group of children who experienced the prolonged separation but whose fathers did not return. Thus, by examining two groups of children, Reunited (with father) and Non-Reunited (Comparison Group), the investigators would be able to study the differential effects of father's return. The purpose of this paper is to present and discuss findings obtained from this proposed, and now completed, investigation.

METHOD

Samples

Two samples of children were drawn from an initial pool of 215 families of servicemen missing in action or prisoners of war whose mothers were interviewed by the Family Studies Branch of the Center for Prisoner of War Studies in 1972 prior to the return of American prisoners of war from Vietnam. The representativeness of the original sample of families was previously established[16]. The first sample, the Reunited sample, consisted of 99 children, 55 boys and 44 girls, whose fathers returned from captivity; and the second sample, the Non-Reunited sample, consisted of 105 children, 58 boys and 47 girls, whose fathers never returned from Vietnam. Of the 43 families included in the Reunited sample, 32 were Navy families, nine were Army families, and two were Marine Corps families. Thirty-eight were families of commissioned

officers, two were families of warrant officers, and three were families of enlisted personnel. Seven of the 99 children were black and the remaining 92 were Caucasian. Of the 52 families included in the Non-Reunited sample, 28 were Navy families, 16 were Army families, seven were Marine Corps families, and one was an Air Force family. Thirty-six were families of commissioned officers and sixteen were families of enlisted personnel.[a] Eight of the 105 children were black and the remaining 97 were Caucasian. In terms of residence, the children in both samples lived in a variety of cities throughout the United States, the majority of which were in California, Virginia and Florida. The mean period of father absence for the Reunited Sample was 5.3 years, and the mean period of father absence for the Non-Reunited sample was 5.9 years. At the time of testing, the mean age of the Reunited sample was 11.5 years and the mean age of the Non-Reunited sample was 11.3 years. At the time that their fathers were taken captives or became casualties, the mean age of the Reunited sample was 4.8 years and the mean age of the Non-Reunited sample was 4.7 years.

Measures

The appropriate level of the California Test of Personality (CTP), Form AA, was administered to the children according to their ages and grade levels and distributed among the subjects as shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

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[a]The chi-square test indicated that the Reunited and Non-Reunited samples were not significantly different when fathers' and mothers' educational experience were compared, but the samples were significantly different when fathers' service rank were compared ($\chi^2 = 8.33$, $p < .01$); the Non-Reunited sample had more enlisted families.

The rationale for using the CTP was (1) because of its reported validity and reliability [17]; (2) because of the availability of established norms for various age and grade levels; (3) because of its appropriateness for a wide range of ages, and (4) because of its organization around the concept of life adjustment as a balance between personal and social adjustment. The CTP is composed of two scales: a personal adjustment scale and a social adjustment scale. The first scale taps six dimensions of personal adjustment, i.e. it is composed of six component scales: self-reliance, sense of personal worth, sense of personal freedom, feeling of belonging, freedom from withdrawal tendencies, and freedom from nervous symptoms. The second scale is designed to measure six dimensions of social adjustment, i.e. it is also composed of six component scales: knowledge of social standards, social skills, freedom from anti-social tendencies, family relations, school relations, and community relations.

Procedure

The mother of each subject was contacted and an appointment scheduled at the family's convenience. All family interviews and children's tests were conducted between March 1974 and April 1975 and took place in the family's home. Each child was instructed to complete the test on his or her own by either circling the appropriate response, YES or NO, or by indicating his choice to the examiner. For those children who had not yet learned to read, the CTP questions were read aloud by the examiner who also recorded the child's responses.

Scoring and Analysis

On the California Test of Personality the number of correct responses yields a raw score for each of the 12 component scales. A total personal

adjustment score is computed by adding the raw scores for each of the six component scales of personal adjustment and a total social adjustment score is computed by adding the raw scores for each of the six component scales of social adjustment. A total adjustment score is derived by summing the total personal and total social adjustment scores. The raw scores were converted to percentile scores for future analysis. The following comparisons were made using a t-test for unequal Ns: (1) the total group of Non-Reunited children vs. the total group of Reunited children on each of the 12 component scale percentile scores as well as each of the three total scale percentile scores; (2) Non-Reunited boys vs. Reunited boys on the three total scale percentile scores and Non-Reunited girls vs. Reunited girls on the three total scale percentile scores; (3) Non-Reunited children under five years of age at the time of their father's casualty vs. Reunited children under five at the time of their father's casualty on the three total scale percentile scores; and (4) Non-Reunited and Reunited children whose fathers were or have been absent less than 30 months vs. Non-Reunited and Reunited children whose fathers were or have been absent more than 60 months on the three total scale percentile scores.

RESULTS

Table 3 indicates that when personal and social adjustment percentile scores from the CTP of the Reunited sample and the Non-Reunited sample were compared, no significant differences were found on the children's total adjustment scores nor on their total social adjustment and total personal adjustment scores. The samples did indicate significant differences on two of the component scale scores; one in the realm of personal adjustment, freedom from nervous symptoms ($t=1.76$, $df = 202$, $p < .05$) and one in the realm of social adjustment, community relations ($t=1.66$, $df = 202$, $p < .05$). The

findings indicated that, as a group, the Reunited children scored higher than the Non-Reunited children on both of these scales and, thus, demonstrate fewer nervous symptoms and better community relations. However, even with significant differences in these two areas for Reunited children, only fewer nervous symptoms has approached the normal range, while community relations continues to remain significantly below the norm.

Insert Table 3 about here

The sub-group comparisons dealing with age and sex differences as well as differences in length of father absence did not reveal significant differences between the two groups.

DISCUSSION

Since the earlier investigation by Dahl and McCubbin[12] indicated some disturbing effects of father absence -- that the Reunited children were lower in both social and personal adjustment than the norm established for the California Test of Personality, the findings of few differences between groups are not surprising. The Reunited and Non-Reunited children were extreme groups -- all the children have experienced unprecedented periods of father absence due to wartime casualties or incarceration. The fact that both groups are exhibiting difficulty with their adjustment is in agreement with the studies establishing the detrimental effects of father absence[1], [2], [3], [4],[5].

The findings that in two of the component scales, freedom from nervous symptoms and community relations, the Reunited children were significantly higher than the Non-Reunited children in their adjustment, indicate that father's return may be a critical variable in that it erased the ambiguity in the children's lives. War-induced separation always introduces a measure of uncertainty; when and if father will return is not known. For the children

of men who were missing in action of prisoners of war, this ambiguity was exacerbated by the prolonged wait without word. In the case of the Reunited children, this ambiguity has been removed, but for the Non-Reunited children there is still the question of when, if ever, father will return. Thus, the Non-Reunited children may be continuing to experience the inner turmoil of hope and fear, the residuals of being "in limbo." On the basis of group discussions held with Non-Reunited children shortly after the return of the American PWs in the Spring of 1973, McCubbin, Hunter, and Metres[18] noted that suppressed emotions played a unique part in the adjustment of the Non-Reunited children; although the open display of emotions was acceptable in the group, the children expressed the feeling that it was not a generally accepted mode of behavior at home - "They did not want to upset their mothers" (p.72). Perhaps, anxiety in the family fosters nervous symptoms in the children. Furman[19] contends that children's dependency on their immediate environment makes them very sensitive to the mood that prevails around them. Teichman[20], in one of the few studies dealing with children whose fathers were classified as missing in action in the Israeli Yom Kippur War, found that the children's reactions were a function of the general atmosphere at home. This finding is in line with that of Hilgard, Newman and Fisk[21] who pointed out that children display extreme sensitivity to their mothers' reactions to loss.

Father's return also appears to play a role in fostering children's development in the realm of community relations; reunited families are more readily assimilated back into the community. This finding is in line with those investigators who view the father as the instrumental leader in the family, as the parent who represents for the children the principles and

rules of society[22], [23]. For the children of non-reunited families, the struggle for social acceptance continues. Throughout the Southeast Asian conflict, the families who were held in the MIA status reported feeling alienated from society at large;[18], [24], [25] they felt as if they were social deviants -- no longer accepted as part of the military community because of the absence of the military member. They were also uncomfortable among most civilians who questioned the validity of the war and their fathers' roles in it. McCubbin, Hunter and Metres[18] reported that children of non-reunited families were deeply self-conscious about having a father missing; the non-reunited children may continue to view their status as inferior to that of children of intact families.

Contrary to studies by Baker et al.[11] and Murphy and Zoobuck[14], it did not appear that father's return had a traumatic effect upon the children's adjustment. However, in spite of the fact that none of the CTP scores of reunited children were significantly lower than those of non-reunited children, it may be hypothesized that father's return is a factor in inhibiting the children's personal and social adjustment, particularly with respect to those areas of child development which continue to remain below the norms established for the CTP.

Father absence continues to have a profound effect upon the children's personal and social adjustment, effects which are not immediately offset by father's return. Independent of father's return, the children of both the Reunited and Non-Reunited samples indicated CTP percentile scores which fell below the norms established for the CTP. Particularly apparent were the total personal, total social and the combined total percentile scores which fell below the norms. Considering that the data for the study were obtained

during the first year following father's return, it may be hypothesized that, over time and as father's place in the family system becomes more established and predictable, improvements in children's adjustment will be noted. Furthermore, with regard to children of non-reunited families, as their mothers draw closure to the prolonged separation and establish a new life for themselves through remarriage, changes in the children's social and personal adjustment scores may also be noted. Within the longitudinal framework of this study of father absence in the military, it is expected that a comparison of children of reunited, non-reunited, and reconstituted families will be possible and essential to our gaining a better understanding of the role of father in the long term adjustment of children who experienced prolonged separations.

Finally, although it was indicated that the Reunited and Non-Reunited samples scored significantly below the norm in their social and personal adjustment, it should be mentioned that caution need be applied when interpreting these findings. First, it must be remembered that the California Test of Personality is not a diagnostic tool, but is primarily a developmental instrument. The fact that the samples are having greater difficulty with their adjustment does not necessarily indicate that there is more psychopathology. When the results of this test reveal evidence of difficulty, the child should be viewed in light of his total environment as far as possible before recommending or indicating a need for treatment. This, of course, would indicate the need for introducing a more extensive battery of instruments, perhaps including some measures of anxiety, sex role identity, etc.

In addition, the need for a control group, that is, children who come from similar socio-economic backgrounds, military families who experience routine periods of father absence, etc., would seem essential in order to verify whether these children of reunited and non-reunited families are, in fact, significantly different in their adjustment from other children.

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TABLE I

COMPARISON OF THE RPW GROUP WITH CTP NORMATIVE DATA*

CTP Scales and Subscales	t Ratios	P
I. PERSONAL		
Self-reliance	-.48	N.S.
Sense of personal worth	-.64	N.S.
Sense of personal freedom	-3.16	<.005
Sense of belonging	-1.40	N.S.
Freedom from withdrawal tendencies	-3.50	<.005
Freedom from nervous symptoms	- .92	N.S.
Total Personal Adjustment	-3.28	<.005
II. SOCIAL		
Social standards	-.58	N.S.
Social skills	-1.43	N.S.
Freedom from antisocial tendencies	-5.43	<.005
Family relations	-4.50	<.005
School relations	-4.98	<.005
Community relations	-2.81	<.005
Total Social Adjustment	-5.46	<.005
III. TOTAL ADJUSTMENT	-4.39	<.005

*Dahl & McCubbin, 1975

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF SUBJECTS ACCORDING TO CTP LEVEL

CTP Level	Subjects	
	Reunited*	Non-Reunited**
PRIMARY (grades kindergarten through 3)	24	31
ELEMENTARY (grades 4 through 7)	31	35
INTERMEDIATE (grades 8 and 9)	18	14
SECONDARY (grades 10 through 12)	26	25

*N= 99

**N= 105

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF THE MIA CHILDREN WITH THE RPW CHILDREN

CTP Scales and Sub-Scales	Mean Percentile Scores		t
	Non-Reunited	Reunited	
I. PERSONAL			
Self-reliance	54.3	50.8	.92
Sense of personal worth	58.1	56.9	.30
Sense of personal freedom	46.8	44.6	.59
Feeling of belonging	52.4	51.2	.28
Freedom from withdrawal tendencies	43.8	44.1	-.07
Freedom from nervous symptoms	45.4	52.3	-1.76*
Total Personal Adjustment	44.3	44.2	.02
II. SOCIAL			
Social standards	46.7	52.2	-1.50
Social skills	46.9	50.2	-.83
Freedom from anti-social tendencies	36.1	37.1	-.23
Family relations	48.9	45.6	.78
School relations	40.2	40.9	-.19
Community relations	39.5	45.9	-1.66*
Total Social Adjustment	36.7	39.7	-.87
III. TOTAL ADJUSTMENT	40.0	41.7	-.52

*p<.05